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SUBJECT: REINVIGORATING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CULTURAL AND  
SPORTS PROGRAMS - RESPONSE FROM JORDAN

REF: STATE 222516

1. Amman strongly endorses Washington's wish to support more cultural and sports programs. These are bridges of communication that are extremely effective notwithstanding the nature of political relations or perceptions. Because of its popular appeal, basketball has opened doors for the U.S. in Jordan in recent years. The performing arts, while often associated exclusively with elite audiences, can serve as a bridge to mutual understanding with non-traditional audiences, especially when youth in high schools/university settings are targeted with appropriate programs. Even straightforward discussions between Americans and Jordanians on various topics can have a tremendous impact if broadcast on those T.V. or radio outlets with high viewer/listener-ship. Broadcast media are the most potent form of communication in Jordan, and can become our most powerful tool if twinned with mass-appeal U.S. culture and sports content.

2. Amman recommends continued sports outreach and untraditional cultural presentations such as street theater or performance art. We encourage Washington to consider funding an occasional extravaganza. If carefully chosen, a tour of a grand show with popular appeal would reflect through its originality and creativity the freedom of American society. It would have enormous impact in the region. The Blue Man Group, a performance art group that combines comedy, multimedia art, and audience participation, may fit the bill perfectly. In the often hostile Middle Eastern setting, we sometimes have to reaffirm Arabs' and Americans' common humanity if we are to have any real chance of maintaining local credibility in our support of homegrown efforts aimed at transforming the region. Few things achieve that as easily and quickly as arts and sports. Blue Men would help open ears for when the time comes to seek support for our official positions.

3. There are rare occasions when a cultural presentation can carry a direct political message. Post is planning a classical piano recital next July at the Radisson-SAS Hotel. As a concert for the reopening of the reconstructed ballroom of the Radisson-SAS hotel, it will be an unmistakable message to those responsible for the Amman bombings on November 9 that Jordanians and Americans stand united against terrorism. We are hopeful that local and/or regional TV stations will record and broadcast this concert. Our RSO will work closely with the Jordanian services to ensure the safety of the venue.

4. Whether programs such as the examples cited above or others yet to be developed, Post will focus on ensuring that cultural and sports programming occurs in a way that supports the growth of the still nascent private sector media in Jordan. Through granting exclusive broadcast rights and offering appealing programming we can stimulate the growing private TV and radio stations serving Jordan.

5. In response to the questions posed in reftel:

Question A. Which of your mission objectives benefits from cultural programs or could be better supported by cultural programs, including sports programs?

A. Cultural and sports programming supports almost all of our mission objectives. An important part of our Public Affairs focus in recent years was to continue outreach to groups that we do not normally engage with, specifically young people, non-elite audiences, and communities outside of the capital.

--Cultural Programming:

Certain cultural programs allow us access to audiences that we would not normally reach, e.g. disadvantaged youth, and women. We schedule a part of our cultural programming in marginalized communities, in and outside the capital Amman.

#### --Sports Programming:

This has allowed us to engage with youth with whom we do not usually interact. In February we hosted two Georgetown University basketball player-coaches as part of the Culture Connect Cultural Envoys program. Working closely with the Jordanian Basketball Federation (JBF), the envoys held nine workout sessions with both young boys and girl's basketball teams, interacting with both the players and the coaches. Their activities received wide media coverage, from the opening reception to the practice sessions to the charity game. A relationship with young people, basketball clubs and their coaches was established that engendered warm feelings toward Americans. The JBF has expressed eagerness to continue working with the Embassy in bringing more expertise in the form of players and coaches to Jordan. The visit served as impetus for a charity basketball game involving a Jordanian team and an international team made up of international players, including the two Envoys. More than 2000 young fans turned out. Later that summer one of the two Georgetown player-coaches returned and served on contract for eight weeks with the Federation, conducting training all over Jordan.

Question B. What kind of specific cultural or sports programs or initiatives are or would be most effective in supporting those objectives?

1A. We plan to use the American Corners, of which there will soon be three, as a venue for cultural activity. Two of the Corners, one at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan's largest university, and the other at the Hashemiya University in Zarqa, have begun to do their own programming, primarily using on-campus speakers. As the Corners become more established, they will increase their cultural offerings. For instance, the Corner at the University of Jordan is planning a film series beginning in January. The Embassy is planning musical performances in the spring and summer, and hopes to use these venues to reach wider audiences.

We have high hopes that the Opus Akoben Hip Hop jazz group, which comes here in February, will appeal to young Jordanian audiences.

There are four other developments worth noting:

1. We are considering a series of sponsored televised debates between American and Jordanian/Arab youth as a means of promoting the transformation agenda. This series would bring together American and Arab youth who have shared a common experience. For instance, a group of Arab students studying in the U.S. could interact with American students studying in various Arab countries. Each group would carry out a series of open discussions (in focus group fashion) about their expectations from their experiences, and the changes in perceptions, if any, as well as points of commonality and differences. We would seek out sponsorship from one of the popular satellite TV stations - Al-Jazeera or Al-Arabiya, with their large audience share. Ideally, a major American network or cable channel would run the program concurrently, both educating the American public and sending a strong message to Arab audiences that the U.S. public is interested in hearing what the Arab community is saying.

2. Young film-makers are becoming very active. The cost of videography being so much lower than film, much documentary and fictional material is being produced. There are avenues for collaboration with the growing pool of talented young Jordanian filmmakers organized in the Amman Film-makers Cooperative. We also work with the Royal Film Commission, and would like to bring in a specialist for technical training for these young film-makers. This should help private T.V. stations, once they get up and running, to obtain locally made content.

3. We will repeat successful High School Summer Arts Camps organized with AMIDEAST. This exchange received rave reviews from the participants. The plan is again to choose 10 students and two instructors to participate in a two-week summer program in the arts for talented students. The program is geared towards underprivileged youth. It has to be said that the cultural gap is harder to bridge, but when the program succeeds, it has a lifetime effect.

4. Theater and Drama in Education. We would like to support the production of a play that can be performed in classrooms at private and public schools in Jordan. The idea is to bring an American playwright and later a producer and a couple of actors to Jordan to work with the Performing Arts Center. The parties would jointly produce a play that addresses cultural and family values

in both societies. We envision that the play will provide understanding of American society and values. Performances, especially if broadcast on T.V., will have a multiplier effect both on the Jordanian actors as well as the general youth audiences. The American artists will have the chance to learn about this part of the world which will be reflected in their future work.

Question C. What constraints does your mission face in effectively utilizing cultural, arts and sports programs?

A. There are serious monetary constraints as well as PAS staffing constraints. Jordanian institutions with which we co-sponsor events suffer from a want of organizational expertise; they rely on the PAS staff to help implement their end of the program.

Time is another constraint at our busy post. In order to reach non-elite audiences we should get out of the capital. Organizing an event far from Amman and taking American visitors there is not always feasible, even if everything else falls into place.

Question D. How have you been able to partner with the private sector in your country to sponsor cultural/sports events, or to overcome resource (staff and funding) constraints?

A. In terms of cultural events we cannot boast of having overcome these constraints: There is not a long tradition of private sector support for the arts. The number of companies that do support the arts is small. We will have to invest a lot of careful work to secure sponsorship for events. The same can be said of sports activities; only a small number of companies are involved. The assumption is that the United States Embassy makes grants rather than requesting them. We have found a public entity, the office of the mayor of Amman, an exception to the rule: City Hall often comes through with substantial in-kind support, and the staff really does its organizational share of co-sponsored events.

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